

## ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** July 10, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Forest Management Project on Threemile Wildlife Management Area

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement to Proceed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to develop a forest management proposal for the Threemile WMA, east of Florence, in Ravalli County. FWP envisions a thinning operation on the scale of a demonstration—approximately 200 affected acres in a forest of 5,000 acres—to pilot several aspects of potentially replicated future treatments. First, FWP proposes to pilot a relationship with Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation foresters to provide silvicultural and sale administration expertise to achieve fish and wildlife objectives set by FWP and the public. Second, FWP proposes to pilot treatments that would release aspen stands from encroaching conifers, reduce competition for moisture around legacy pines and snag recruits, and reduce the risk of stand replacing fire when fires do occur. Third, FWP proposes to make any road improvements of value in reducing sediment delivery to Threemile Creek and enhancing hunter access. Finally, FWP hopes to develop a project that could be implemented this coming winter, and to serve as a baseline for improving any future forest management prescriptions.

### **Public Involvement and Process Results**

FWP will begin obtaining public input in the form of scoping, and prepare a draft environmental assessment for public review. FWP will incorporate public comment into a final environmental assessment and recommendation for a Commission decision later this year.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

No action will allow fuels to continue accumulating on the WMA, which will continue to increase the risk of a wildfire burning all trees, instead of burning a mosaic pattern of the sort that would naturally occur in this ponderosa pine forest.

FWP could consider a larger action, involving more acres, but to do so would encumber the time and resources of both FWP and DNRC to the extent that valuable management would not occur this winter. FWP also values the concept of a demonstration, to learn what works and what could be improved before thinking about a larger treatment.

### **Agency Recommendation and Rationale**

FWP would like to develop a more detailed proposal and conduct public involvement to begin managing the forest on Threemile WMA. It is fortunate the WMA has escaped to date the inevitable wildfire in a frequent-fire environment, and it is important for the management of wildlife habitat that the fire severity be managed, to the extent possible, with a proactive prescription.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission endorse the proposal to begin public involvement toward developing a forest management demonstration project on Threemile WMA as presented by FWP.